



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE removes former member of Serbian military to Bosnia

PHOENIX – A former member of the Serbian army who concealed his military service to qualify for refugee status in the United States has been removed to his native country of Bosnia-Herzegovina by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Raiko Ninkovic, 63, was returned to Bosnia May 5, nearly four months after being named in the first judicial order of removal ever entered by the U.S. District Court in Arizona. That order came as part of a plea agreement between Ninkovic, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, and ICE. The agreement also required Ninkovic to give up his refugee status and agree to be removed to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ninkovic was charged with lying on his application for refugee status in 1998 when he stated he had never served in the Serbian military. A refugee fraud investigation conducted by ICE revealed that Ninkovic had been a member of the 1st Infantry Battalion of the 1st Bratunac Light Infantry Brigade of the Drina Corps, which has been implicated in war crimes and genocide related to the Srebrenica massacre that occurred in July 1995 in the former Yugoslavia.

Due to the atrocities committed during the Bosnian conflict in the early 1990s, some people from this region who claim refugee status in the United States hide the details of their military service.

Ninkovic was one of 13 Bosnians in the Phoenix area indicted last year on federal criminal charges for failing to disclose on their immigration paperwork that they previously served in the Serbian military. While Ninkovic is the first to be removed, the 12 others also face eventual deportation. The investigation leading to the arrests was conducted by ICE and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.